NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *70-80 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 534 NEW YORK, MARCH 23, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

IDAYAH, THE WOMAN OF MYSTERY

OR,

NICK CARTER'S FOURFOLD PROBLEM

by THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

Nick seized Starbuck in his arms, lifted him bodily and leaped with his burden away from the machine, and they fell together through the intervening space to the roof of Nick Carter's house.

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IDAYAH, THE WOMAN OF MYSTERY

OR,

Nick Carter's Fourfold Problem.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A WOMAN OF MYSTERY.

"I have been a jailer all my life, Mr. Carter. My father was a jailer before me. I might with perfect truth say that I was brought up in a jail. I have been employed at one time and another in almost every prison in the State. I knew about prisons at the age when a fisherman's boy would learn to handle a boat, and yet I may say that I have never heard of an escape like this one."

The detective tapped his pencil meditatively upon the desk and sat for a time silent.

"Let us get directly at the affair," he said at last. "You enter here with the information that the woman, Idayah—Idayah, the Mysterious, I believe you have called her—has escaped. Then, when I ask you how she escaped, you began to reply with an apology for your own remissness of duty. Now——"

"I didn't mean it in that way, Mr. Carter."

"Pardon me, but you did. All men like to belittle their own shortcomings and failures, and delight to enlarge upon their successes. You never hear a poker-player tell about the time the other fellow held four queens against his own four jacks; it is always the time when *he* held the queens that he describes to you. The point is that the woman has escaped. The *question* is—*how?*"

"That is exactly what I don't know."

"You don't know how she escaped?"

"No."

"I see that you are somewhat piqued about what I have just said to you. It always hurts the feelings of a man when one slights his conceit." The detective smiled encouragingly and added: "I think that I will have to smooth down your ruffles a little, so I will tell you this: I am not in the least surprised to hear that Idayah has escaped. In fact I would not be surprised to learn that she went up through the roof or down through the floor, or dissolved into thin air—or did something that is equally impossible to describe."

"That is exactly what she did do," grumbled the man.

"Which?"

"All of them."

The detective laughed outright.

"All of them, eh?" he repeated. "She went up through

the roof, she went down through the floor, and she dissolved into thin air. Come! That is interesting. Now suppose you tell me exactly what did happen."

"That's what I cannot do. I don't know what happened."

"You are a sort of assistant warden at the prison, aren't you, Rollins?" asked the detective.

"Yes. I haven't the title, but I do the work. In reality I am head keeper, I suppose."

"All the same, you are a man in authority at the prison, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And when Cranshaw, the warden, is away, you act as warden in his absence, don't you?"

"Yes."

"And, now, I suppose you will tell me that when this escape happened, Cranshaw was away and you were in power temporarily? No?"

"Yes."

"Idayah is a very beautiful woman, Rollins."

"That's the devil of it, Mr. Carter."

"The devil of it. Am I to understand that she bedeviled you? Is that what you mean?"

"Something very much like it."

"Come; let us see if I cannot guess what happened. If I don't guess somewhere near the truth of the matter, you must set me right as I proceed."

"Go on," said the jailer sulkily. He did not in the least enjoy the somewhat bantering tone that the detective had adopted. He had an uneasy suspicion that the detective was guying him, and, like all conceited men, he disliked exceedingly to be guyed.

"I have already reminded you of the fact that Idayah is an extraordinarily beautiful woman," continued the detective, lighting a fresh cigar and leaning back comfortably in his chair. "I might with truth have added that you are rather an exceptionally good-looking man, and— "

"I don't think you ought to make game of me, Mr. Carter. This is a very serious matter—for me."

"I quite appreciate that; but I am trying to impress upon you the fact that your exceptional good looks and your familiarity with them comprehends the reply to my question of a moment ago, which you informed me you could not answer."

"What question?"

"I asked you *how* Idayah escaped, and you said you did not know."

"Well?"

"Idayah escaped because, first, she is a beautiful woman, and, second, because you are a good-looking fellow—and know it," said the detective, with a smile.

"Really, Mr. Carter, if I didn't know so well that you are only joshing me, I would get angry at this sort of talk."

"Yes, Rollins, I am joshing you—making fun of you—but all the same I have told you the truth even though it is a disagreeable one. Idayah, being beautiful, attracted your attention and your sympathy, and you told her as much with your eyes and in your manner toward her. You being good looking, lost no opportunity to exhibit yourself to her, and also you let no opportunity pass to exchange a word with her while she was under your care. Now tell me the truth; isn't that so?"

"I suppose that—well—I didn't try to exhibit—Confound it all!"

"I understand you. You doubtless let her understand, without saying it in so many words, that while she was in your care, you would do all that you consistently could, to make things as comfortable for her as possible. Eh, Rollins?"

"Possibly I did."

"Exactly. Rollins, Idayah is a very far-seeing young woman. She can see just as far through the square shaft-hole of a millstone as anybody, and she saw and read plainly your admiration for yourself as well as for her—and so, having bided her time, she sent for you. Eh? Is that the idea?"

"I don't know how the devil——"

"Of course you don't. If you did, you would be the detective and I would be the good-looking jailer in this case."

"Please, Mr. Carter, leave off chaffing me, will you?"

"All right. If I have succeeded in taking some of the conceit out of you, and have reduced you to the point where you will tell me the exact truth without embellishment, and also without mental reservation, we'll get down to the case now, and have the story just as it is—for notwithstanding your statement of a moment ago, you *do* know *how* she escaped."

"I suppose I'm an ass," said the jailer humbly, "and I may as well begin by admitting it."

"That is promising," replied the detective. "Now, get ahead with the story."

"Cranshaw went away yesterday morning, expecting to return in the afternoon; but at about four o'clock, when I was just about to start on my afternoon rounds, he sent me word—telephoned, you know—that he would not be back last night at all. Asked me if I could look out for things so that he might remain away. I told him——"

"Never mind what you told him. He was away; you had his work to do—and when you went through the prison after hearing from him, you discovered that that fact was an excuse for the exchange of a few words with your fair prisoner, eh?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"You know, of course, that I have to pass through the women's prison as well as the other part?"

"Yes."

"I stopped a moment at the door of her cell and asked her how she was feeling. She said she was all right. Then she asked me if I would do her the favor to send out for a box of candy for her. She thought that something sweet would taste uncommonly good to her."

Nick laughed again.

"You told her you would, of course," he said; "whereupon she offered you the money, and you pretended not to see it, or something of that sort, and ultimately you sent out for the candy, which you sent in to her. Go on with the tale."

"One would think that you were there."

"Oh, no; but you are here. It is the same thing. Go on."

"It was about nine o'clock last night when she sent for me and——"

"Wait a moment. You have forgotten one thing."

"What is that?"

"You have forgotten to tell me that you told her that the warden was away for the night, and that you had his work to do. You *did* tell her that, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And then you sent her the candy. At nine o'clock she sent for you. Now tell me what happened? Did she have a pain? She certainly made some excuse, so that you thought it your plain duty to enter her cell, didn't she? You *did* enter her cell, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Now"—and Nick's voice was stern and uncompromising—"tell me exactly what happened."

"She told me that the chocolates had given her a bad headache, and she asked me if I had any bromo-caffein that I could give her. She said she did not want the prison doctor. She did not care to take the things he would prescribe for her; that bromo-caffein always worked like magic with her when she had a headache, and if I had some, or would get some for her, she would be eternally obliged—and all that, you know."

"Precisely. All that—and more. Go on."

"I had some. I think I had mentioned the fact to her once before when she had a slight headache, but that time she did not want it. This time she possibly recalled the fact, and asked for it."

"Yes. She has a good memory, I've no doubt. You went after the bromo, and took it to her cell yourself, instead of sending it to her. You thought you would go still farther, and administer it, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And that is how you got inside of her cell—isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And it is also how she got *outside* of it—isn't it?"

"It is."

"We are getting at it now."

"No. We haven't begun to get at it yet. The mysterious part of it comes now."

CHAPTER II.

THE DISAPPEARING POWDER.

"Go on, then. You returned with the bromo, and you went inside her cell to administer it. Tell me what happened then."

"I mixed the bromo for her and she drank it; then ——"

"That's good. She is one who is willing to take her own medicine, at least."

"Then she dropped her glass, and of course it smashed on the cement floor."

"At which you very gallantly stooped to gather up the pieces; and then—what did she do then? Did she rap you on the head and knock you galley-west, or did she sprinkle some sort of powder in your face, and so blind you? Or did she——"

"You hit it—or hit at it—that second time, Mr. Carter."

"Oh! It was the powder act, then, eh? I had an experience with one of her powders once. It was not a pleasant one, either. I remember that I was blinded, and for a moment everything in the room and round about where I stood seemed to fade out of sight."

"That is what happened to me—precisely. I will tell you all about it."

"Do, for goodness' sake."

"I had to stoop to get at the broken glass on the floor. I wasn't exactly on my knees, but I was what you might call 'squatted down,' eh?"

"That is a very classic term. Go on."

"I heard her exclaim, 'Oh, Mr. Rollins! Look!' and I raised my face. As I did so I saw that she held in her hand an article which in that brief glance looked to me like a rubber ball. But I had only that one glance, for she reached out, pressed it against my face, and—the thing exploded; burst, you know."

"Yes."

"'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'I'm so sorry!' I was blinded. I couldn't see a thing. I had the sensation of suddenly having lost my sight, but there was no pain, no smarting in my eyes, no disquietude of any kind. Then she spoke to me again.

"'If you will stand perfectly still for a few moments and not try to talk,' I heard her say, 'the inconvenience you suffer will soon pass away. Keep your eyes open and your mouth tightly closed.'

"Well, I did that. I don't know how long the tableau lasted, but it must have been some time. Time seems long under such circumstances; but I waited, with my eyes wide open and my mouth shut. I was rather surprised that she did not speak again, but if I supposed

anything at all about it, my idea was that she was also blinded by the accident and was doing the same that I was, while waiting for the effect of the strange experience to pass.

"And so I suppose that ten minutes must have elapsed before my vision began to return to me. The opaqueness began to disappear; objects in the room became indistinctly visible, and then, as suddenly as the blindness had fallen upon me, it disappeared, and I could see as well as ever. Now, can you guess what I saw?"

"If I should do any guessing at all it would be that you saw nothing save the vacant cell. Your prisoner had quietly stepped outside while you were standing there with your eyes open, though blinded, and your mouth tightly closed."

"You are right, Mr. Carter. She had left the cell. But even then it did not occur to me that she had made her escape, or had tried to do so. I supposed she had passed out upon the corridor and I started forward to follow her."

"And found that she had managed to lock the cell door against you?"

"And found that she had locked the door."

"How did she secure the key?"

"In mixing the bromo for her to take, I was obliged to use both hands. I put the keys down on the edge of her cot. She had merely to pick them up and use them. The surprising part of it was that I did not hear her close the door or lock it."

"That is not surprising. In the first place she doubtless worked with extreme caution and silence; again, your mind was concentrated on your own condition, and was more or less oblivious to your surroundings—and so she succeeded in locking the door against you. Well, go on with your yarn."

"It is almost told now. There isn't much more. As soon as I found that I was locked in, I realized what had happened. I called aloud to the guard on that tier and I shook the door of the cell, trying to open it. I could not open the door, of course; and I had to call several times before I received a reply from the guard.

"'Come here, Conroy!' I ordered him, as soon as he replied to me. He is an Irishman; a big fellow.

"'Sure, I'm as blind as a bat!' he said. 'When I can see me way I'll go to you. Hold your whist now; it's coming back to me.'

"Well, to make a long story short, he came at last, and released me, and then I found that he had been served in practically the same manner as I. He had seen me enter Idayah's cell and leave the door open after me. He had been reading a book under the light at the end of the corridor, and knowing that I was inside the cell, he had resumed his reading. After that he did not hear a sound or have any sensation at all until suddenly the print on the page he was reading was blotted out and everything else with it, and at the same time he experienced a sense of suffocation. Not a serious one, but it was there. I think I had a touch of it also.

"But you must understand that Conroy had not heard a sound and had no idea that any person was near him, and therefore he attributed his trouble to anything but the right cause.

"He says that he sat there thinking it over, and wondering what had happened to him. He was scared stiff for a moment, believing that he had suddenly been stricken blind, for he had been reading about just such a circumstance, strangely enough. And that is the end of Conroy's story."

"And almost the end of yours, as well, I suppose," said the detective.

"There is a little more, but not much."

"Wait. Conroy had not heard the sound of any person approaching him?"

"No."

"Nor seen anybody?"

"No."

"From where he was seated, in what position was the door located, that leads from that part of the prison?"

"It is fully thirty feet from where he was seated. The interior of the prison is an oblong square. Let us say that the length of it is north and south and that Conroy was seated in a chair under the light a few feet distant from the southeast corner. The door leading out of that part of the prison is at the southwest corner, or near it."

"Good. I understand. Now, relative to them, where is the cell in which the woman locked you fast?"

"Two-thirds or more of the distance toward the north end of the oblong square, and on the east side of the prison."

"So that Idayah, in passing from the cell to the door, to make her escape, was obliged to pass Conroy, where he was seated."

"No; not obliged to do so. She might have gone around by the north end of the gallery."

"You speak of the gallery. Am I then to understand that there is a door leading out of the prison, on that elevation?"

"Yes. It is called the warden's door—because he and I are the only ones who ever make use of it."

"Then I suppose that it opens directly upon his private quarters?"

"It communicates with a private office that he is fond of using—a place where he keeps his private accounts, writes his letters, and all that."

"And the main door out of the prison—where is that?"

"Directly under the door I have described. It is a much larger door; the regular prison door."

"How many tiers of cells are there in that part of the prison?"

"Four, counting the one on the ground floor."

"And which one are we speaking about?"

"The second one; that is the one directly above the ground floor."

"I suppose there is a gallery with a rail, which runs entirely around that oblong square."

"Yes."

"What is the width of that gallery?"

"Thirty inches. The width of the inside of an ordinary house door."

"Then, if Conroy was seated on that gallery, reading under the light, the probability is that he had his chair tilted against the wall and his feet on the rail—or whether that is so or not, it is certain that he occupied too much room for Idayah to pass him without brushing against him."

"That is certain."

"Therefore she must have tiptoed down to him and blinded him with the same powder she used in your case, and then have gone as silently back again, and so on all the way around the square to the door which was only about thirty feet from him."

"That is the only way I can figure out that she was able to reach it without his knowledge."

"Of course there was a key to that door among those which you laid upon Idayah's cot at the time you freed your hands in order to open the bromo?"

"Of course."

"As a matter of fact how many keys are on that ring, or chain?"

"Six; they are——"

"Never mind what they are. It is not necessary. It is sufficient that the key to that outer door was among them. You made use of the present tense in referring to the lot, which implies that you have recovered the keys. Tell me where you found them?"

"I was about to explain that one of the six keys fits the lock on the front door of the warden's house—the door which leads out upon the veranda and thence to the street. There is no impediment beyond that save the wall which is passed by going through a small door."

"And there is a key also to fit *that* lock?"

"Yes."

"That accounts for four of the keys; the one for the cells, for the warden's door, for the front door of the warden's house, and for the small door through the brick wall that surrounds his private grounds. Two remain. What are they for?"

"One fits the lock of the door from the warden's private office to the house proper; the remaining one is for the big door on the ground floor of the prison."

"I see. So in passing from the prison into the warden's private office, Idayah had to unlock again a door from that room into the house; and then, later, still another door which released her as far as the grounds; and then still another which let her into the street."

"Exactly."

"That brings me again to the question, where did you find the keys, after the escape?"

"On the walk which leads from the front porch to the gate through the wall."

"So it is probable that she threw them back over the top of the wall after she had passed out."

"Yes; and that is not all. She crowded this into the ringed handle of one of the keys."

The jailer extended a slip of paper as he spoke, and Nick noticed that the man was blushing like a schoolgirl; but the detective took the paper and read what was written upon it, and then threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"It is too good to keep," he said; "but I wonder that you let me know about it."

"Like you, I thought it too good to keep," replied Rollins. The message written on the slip of paper was:

"I take this method of throwing a parting kiss to you, good jailer."

"Cheeky of her, wasn't it?" asked Rollins, sheepishly.

"Very tender and sweet and thoughtful, I call it," replied the detective.

CHAPTER III.

FROM A COUNTRY OF MYSTERY.

"Now let us return to the scene inside the cell," said the detective.

"Very well, sir."

"In order to have overcome you and Conroy both, as she did, Idayah must have had a double supply of the mysterious powder; eh?"

"Yes. I have thought of that."

"And you have told me that you caught a glimpse of something that suggested a rubber ball to you."

"Yes."

"In your inane foolishness about the beauty of Idayah and your own good looks, how much license have you allowed her, in regard to procuring things from outside the prison? In a word, have you permitted her to send to the drug-store for things?"

"No; never."

"Well, what have you permitted her to send for?"

"She wished some things from her rooms where she lived before she went to the prison. The warden himself permitted her to send for them. I had nothing to do with that. I think you know where her rooms were located, don't you?"

"Yes; over in Jersey City. Go on."

"When the things were sent for, a woman was sent to get them. The articles were inspected when they were brought into the prison, and were found to be merely harmless toilet articles such as a woman dislikes to be

deprived of. She was permitted to have them, and I have since thought——"

"Never mind what you have thought. The fact is this: Somewhere among those effects she had the powder which she used on you, concealed; also small and thin rubber receptacles which she could easily inflate. After she once became possessed of them she had only to await her opportunity which came as you have described. Now, Rollins, why have you come to me with this tale?"

"I thought that possibly I could induce you to help me get her back again. My position depends upon it."

"You mean, I suppose, that you have been suspended."

"Yes."

"It is too bad. I am sorry for you, but after all you deserved it."

"Don't you think that you can find her, Mr. Carter?"

"I don't know. That is a difficult question to answer. Idayah is a tough proposition to bank upon. It was last night that she escaped?"

"Yes."

"Soon after nine o'clock, eh?"

"Yes; about half-past nine."

"What time was it when you got as far along as the finding of the keys?"

"The big prison clock was striking ten when I picked them up."

"Then she had a good half hour the start of you?"

"All of that."

"What measures did you take for recapturing her?"

"The usual ones. The alarm was sounded; I sent out half a dozen men in as many different directions; I had the police of the neighborhood all at work; I did everything that I could think of, personally—and it was all done without the slightest result."

"There was no trace of her, eh?"

"Not one—anywhere."

"Nobody remembered to have seen her?"

"No."

"And yet her description is such that if she was seen at all she should have been remembered."

"I should suppose so."

"Let me hear you describe her. I want to see how graphically you can do it."

"Well, it goes without saying that she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw; I don't believe that anybody ever saw a woman half so beautiful as she is. Her eyes are so black, and bright, and dreamy, and soft, and fierce and passionate, all in one, and her complexion is so fair and yet so perfectly tinted; and her hair is so blonde that it is nearly white, and her figure is so perfect, and, and, and——"

"I think that will do very well. You may go up head in your class."

"I say, Mr. Carter, if she only had pink eyes she would have been an Albino, wouldn't she; eh?"

"Something very nearly like it—yes."

"Anyhow, she got away and she has lost me my job; and I want to get her back again."

"I think it rather doubtful if you ever get her back again, Rollins. Just for your own information I will tell you something about that woman. Of course you know what she was in prison for. It was the murder at the horse show, the death of Baron Sternfeldt, who was supposed to have been killed by accident, by a horse. When I arrested her for that crime, she only laughed at me; she told me that the prison wasn't made that could hold her; she made no bones at all of confessing her guilt of that murder, although I have always had my doubts if hers were the actual hands that did it. I think that she directed the killing, but I also believe that she did not do the deed—that is the knife-throwing part of it. You know the baron's death was a peculiar one. He might be said to have been killed twice—and it is rather difficult for one man to be killed twice; don't you think so?"

"Once would do for mine."

"Somebody threw or shot a poisoned dart into the old baron's side; that would have done for him all right without the horse. Somebody had trained a horse to kill anybody who happened to smell of a certain perfume. One could not blame the horse for feeling like committing murder when he smelled it, nor is one surprised that that particular odor was selected by the human who taught the animal. Idayah confessed to both counts."

"But who is she? What is she, Mr. Carter?"

"Ah! Now you are touching upon something that deeply interests me, and it is because I am interested in the woman, that I am going to try to help you out of your difficulties by recapturing her."

"Thank you——"

"She comes from a country which lies just north of India—almost, if not quite, between India and Tibet. It is a very mysterious place—that whole country, in fact; but particularly that part of it from whence Idayah came.

"It is among the Himalaya mountains, the highest in the world and it isn't far—her own country, I mean—from Mt. Everest itself. In the midst of that country, hidden away among the impassable peaks of the Himalayas, is a place that is known to the people of that part of the world as the 'Sacred Valley.' It is said that one who enters there, never returns.

"But there is one man here in New York, who has been in that valley and who has returned. I have not heard all of his story yet, for the reason that the opportunity has not offered; but now I shall call upon him tonight and get the whole of it.

"It is sufficient for your information, Rollins, that the gentleman is Mr. Gerald Starbuck and that at the time I arrested Idayah in Jersey City, she had abducted Starbuck, drugged him with one of her mysterious mixtures,

although he swears that he had not swallowed a single thing, and but for an accident, she would have gotten safely away with him.

"What she intended to do with him, I do not know."

"Do you mean the Starbuck who is called the great Whip?" asked Rollins.

"Yes. That is the man. He is six feet two in his stockings; he could pick up an ordinary horse and carry it across the street, he is so strong; he weighs two hundred and ten, or about that, is an athlete, is not afraid of anything—and yet the woman you wish me to capture for you, led him away from under my very eyes as easily as if he had been a young bullock with an iron ring in his nose. She would have gotten away with him, too, only for an accident which put me on the track."

"Gee! I'm glad that it didn't occur to her to carry me off."

"I think if you had ever visited the 'Sacred Valley' she would have carried you off, or killed you. I think that is what she is here for; here in this country."

"I don't understand."

"I have thought the matter over considerably since that incident at the Garden, and I am forced to the conclusion that whoever enters that 'Sacred Valley' in Nepaul—that is the name of the country I have described to you—that who ever enters the 'Sacred Valley' of Nepaul, is not permitted to come out again; and if one does succeed in getting out, that person is either killed, or is somehow taken back there."

"Sort of a Rider Haggard business, isn't it, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes; and there is a lot more truth in 'Rider Haggard places,' scattered about this world than we who sit quietly here at home, have any idea of.

"That part of the world from whence she comes, Rollins, is as much a mystery to us here, as are the planets which we can see only through telescopes. More so, in fact, for we can see the planets through the lenses, but we cannot even do that, in regard to those unknown regions of the Himalayas.

"Once, about three years ago, I had a case in which a strange character by the name of Dazaar, was involved. Dazaar came from that same locality, and I am inclined to think that I shall encounter in this affair, something of the same conditions I ran up against at that time—only perhaps more so."*

The detective ceased abruptly and rising he crossed the floor to his cabinet where he took down a book of notes and studied through the pages for several moments.

"Telling you all about this affair serves to refresh my memory," he said, returning to his chair. "I will tell you a little more."

"Please."

"I mentioned a moment ago, that one of the causes of death to the baron, at the Garden, was a poisoned dart which somebody had thrown or shot into the man's side, under the left arm, and a little to the rear of it."

"Yes, sir."

"During my researches after the thing happened, I had occasion to go to the office that was temporarily occupied by Mr. Starbuck. While there I exhibited the tiny dagger, which was only a dart after all. He recognized it at once, and told me that it came from the country I have mentioned, in the heart of Nepaul.

"I asked him to tell me the full story about it, and he started to do so. He had arrived at the point where my interest was absorbed, when he stopped suddenly and begged of me not to move, if I valued my life.

"I supposed that a serpent, or something of the sort had got into the room, but it was this woman who has just escaped from your prison, although I did not know her, and had never seen or heard of her at the time. Starbuck got a promise out of me that I would not move or seek to change my position for a length of time. Then he got up and left the room, saying that he would return in fifteen minutes.

"Well, the point is that he did not finish his story, and that when I did see him again, it was in Jersey City, and he, although he is a giant in strength and stature, was as helpless as a babe in her hands, and as completely her slave as if—well, he was her slave, that's all.†

"That is all you need to know now, I think. I am going, right away, to hear the rest of that story. You may sit here and await my return, if you like. There are books with which you may amuse yourself. Will you wait?"

"Yes; if you are willing."

"All right. I'll promise you a startling story, I think, on my return."

Without more words the detective secured his hat and coat and left the house, and directed that he be driven at once to the residence of Gerald Starbuck.

CHAPTER IV.

A RECAPITULATION OF FACTS.

The detective was much more deeply interested in the story of the escape as told to him by Rollins, than he had permitted to appear.

From the very beginning of the case at Madison Square Garden which had led to the abduction of Gerald Starbuck, and finally to the arrest of Idayah, the Woman of Mystery, he had recognized something that was decidedly out of the ordinary.

While he was riding around to the bachelor apartment

*The history of Dazaar is contained in Nos. 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

†See No. 533 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "Facing an Unseen Terror."

house where Starbuck had his rooms, he thought over, for his own advantage, all the incidents that had led up to his association with the case which had finally resulted in the strange and incomprehensible as well as inexplicable escape of Idayah from the prison where she had been confined.

It is permitted of us for the sake of chronology of incident, to read his thoughts as he rode forward on his errand, for he grouped them systematically.

"I will go back," he told himself, "to the moment when I entered the Garden that afternoon and I will write the incidents down on my memory in consecutive form, for future reference, for unless I am greatly mistaken, the end is not yet—by far.

"First, then: I was passing the Garden, with no idea of attending the horse show, when an impulse bade me enter. I found the usual throng of such functions in attendance, and passed through the crowd idly, and without particular interest. It happened to be the hour for exhibiting the hunters, and, as hunters interest me, I worked my way closer to the rail in the effort to see.

"There was one horse among them which particularly attracted my attention because of his beauty, ease of action, and undoubted superiority as a jumper; a large, black horse with tan points, which is of itself an unusual condition.

"Second: While near the rail and engaged in admiring the horse, I heard a voice say in my ear, or at least it was quite close to me, 'That man is a criminal!' Turning to discover who had made the remark, I could not determine. I resumed my regard for the horse, when the remark was repeated, and again I was unable to determine who had spoken. I heard the remark almost in the same words, the third time, and again could not tell who had made it.

"Third: I supposed, possibly without reason, that the remark referred to the man who was riding the black hunter; a horse entered under the name of 'Arab.' That was doubtless my intuition, for I had no reason to suppose the remark to be directed against that particular man. And right here I must make a note of the fact that the rapidity of events which happened after that time rendered it unnecessary that I should seek out that rider. I do not now know who he was, and that is one of the things that I must find out, even at this late day.

"Fourth: I was presently addressed openly by a man whom I afterward learned was known as Baron Sternfeldt; a middle aged man, older than he appeared, who had brought letters of introduction to society people in New York. The baron, after talking with me for a moment, left me abruptly and disappeared in the crowd. At the same time, Con Conner of the Central Office spoke to me, and while we were talking, there was a commotion from toward the far end of the ring.

"Fifth: I hastened to the spot where the commotion occurred and found that the man who had just been talking with me was dead. Nobody could tell how the accident happened; nobody could be found who could give a coherent explanation of the affair; the consensus of information evolved merely the one fact that the horse in being led from the ring to be taken below, had reared and struck the baron with his right fore foot, a blow which had crushed the man's skull and killed him.

"Sixth: Having made myself known, I got through the crowd and told the policeman to keep people back; then, while looking upon the dead man, I saw that some sort of weapon had pierced his side under the left arm and somewhat to the rear of it. Seizing a blanket, I threw it over the body. The body was taken to one of the administration rooms where I caused the door to be locked and placed a policeman on guard outside while Conner and I remained inside with the body.

"Seventh: When I talked with the man who was afterward killed, I noticed that his clothing smelled strongly of a certain perfume which I do not like, and which for that reason doubtless I noticed the more plainly. It is a perfume called Pau d'Espagne. The man had evidently used it in unusual quantity—it was almost as if some had been spilled upon him, for he literally reeked with it. In the administration room when Conner and I were with the body, I made another mental comment of the fact.

"Eighth: As soon as Conner and I were alone I called his attention to the weapon in the dead man's side and we decided that the wound from that would have killed him even if he had not been struck by the horse; in fact, that either would have killed him; also that the two blows, one from the horse's hoof and the other from the weapon, had happened almost simultaneously, the presumption being that the weapon had preceded the other by the fraction of a second.

"Ninth: While awaiting the arrival of the coroner I left Conner in charge and went to the basement of the building where the horses are kept, to have a look at the horse who was supposed to have killed the man. I found the horse and entered the box stall where he was kept. I examined his fore feet and found that they had been lately polished—as if to wipe away all evidence that he had struck the man with them.

"I turned to a cupboard where brushes and other things were kept, my intention being to find and examine the cloth with which the horse's hoofs had been rubbed; but the instant I opened the door of the cupboard my nostrils were assailed by the odor of Pau d'Espagne, and I found a piece of chamois skin which reeked with it.

"Rather surprised at this, I took down the piece of chamois skin, and as I did so, was interrupted by the hostler who cared for the horse. I closed the door of the cupboard, retaining the chamois skin in my hand, and for the moment forgetting that my search had been for an-

other cloth, with which the horse's hoofs had been muffled.

"Tenth: I approached the horse with the bit of chamois in my hand, and was surprised to notice that the animal gave signs of excitement as I drew nearer. The hostler called to me, but I paid no attention. Then the horse made a savage attack upon me from which I barely escaped with my life, nearly meeting the fate that had befallen the baron.

"I became satisfied that the odor of that perfume had somehow enraged the horse, and was convinced that he had been trained to attack and kill any person who happened to smell of it. I found the hostler to be non-communicative. His own name was Mudge; the name of the supposed owner of the horse was Alfred Damon; the name of the man who had ridden the horse that day, was Mr. Pythias. Plainly both were assumed names; Damon and Pythias.

"Returning, I told the coroner what I had discovered. After the conclusion of our examination, we went to the basement of the building together, but only to discover that the horse and the hostler as well had disappeared in the interim.

"Eleventh: I was convinced that there had been two distinct attempts on the life of the baron that afternoon, both having originated from the same impulse, each however being an individual effort and either one of which would have resulted in success without the aid of the other; but that they were connected and associated with each other in their inception, there can be no doubt.

"Twelfth: Investigation into the life of the baron revealed nothing. He stopped temporarily at the Mammoth; his clothing bore no identification marks whatever; a valet had served him who had been called Idayah, but the valet had disappeared; the man had been known to be abundantly supplied with cash. That sums up all that was found out about him. His body was exposed for identification at Merritt's, but remained as mysterious as ever. Later, the body was embalmed and laid away for future reference at my expense.

"Thirteenth: I returned to the Garden and sought out Cecil Starbuck, supposedly the best posted man about town and society in all New York; and also one of the prominent men of the show.

"I learned nothing new from him relative to the murder, but in my talk with him I exhibited the weapon that had pierced the baron's side, which I had secured from the coroner.

"Fourteenth: Starbuck recognized the weapon as being exactly like others that he had seen before. He is a great traveler. Once in his travels he had visited the country of Nepaul, which lies north of India; he had encountered a strange people there, and had seen just such weapons, called by a word which is equivalent to dart, in that country.

"At my solicitation, he began to tell me the story of his adventure in that country. I was seated with my back to the door and he was facing it. In the midst of his story—before he had gotten well into it—he suddenly stopped, stared, appeared frightened, begged me not to move if I valued my life; and finally having secured a promise from me that I would retain the position I was in for fifteen minutes, he left me.

"All that I knew about that scene was that he admitted that a woman stood behind me.

"Fifteenth: When the time was up for which my promise held good, Starbuck had disappeared. I succeeded in tracing him to the Twenty-third Street ferry of the Pennsylvania Railroad, where he had crossed in company with three others, one of whom answered to the description of the people he had mentioned in his story, and also to the general description of the valet who had served the baron.

"On the Jersey City side of the ferry I lost trace of them; ultimately I saw the woman through the window of a hack that was passing. Starbuck was inside the hack with her. I pursued and ultimately arrested the woman in a house where she had taken refuge. An accident in the street had smashed the hack.

"Sixteenth: When I arrested the woman she confessed to me that she had played the part of the valet who was called Idayah. Her two companions had disappeared, and could not be found. She confessed all responsibility for the death of the baron; claimed the horse as hers, and admitted that it had been trained to kill when it smelled that odor; stated that she was guilty of the knife-throwing.

"When I arrested her, she defied me; told me that the prison was not made that could hold her, and otherwise seemed utterly indifferent to the predicament she was in.

"Seventeenth: The racial characteristic of her people consists of an almost Albino-like complexion and shade of hair, but all have sloe-black eyes, which are large and expressive, giving to the face and features a peculiar form of beauty which is most striking.

"Eighteenth: Starbuck, when rescued from the wreck of the hack, which had collided with a milk-wagon, was found to be in a peculiar condition of mind which was supposed to have resulted from a drug he had taken, or had been compelled to take. He recovered from it very slowly, and was taken out of town by his friends. It is only within a day that I have heard that he is prepared to see me and tell me all he knows about his adventures.

"Nineteenth: And now, just as the time is ripe for me to solve all the mysteries that were left in puzzledom—just as Starbuck reaches a condition where he is able to tell me all, the woman Idayah has escaped from her prison and is again at large.

"Twentieth: If I am to evolve anything at all from

all this, and particularly from this coincidence of her escape with his recovery, I must conclude *that Idayah knew perfectly well the day and hour when he would come out from under the cloud created by the drug he had taken; and that she timed her escape from prison accordingly.*

"There are twenty points, but it occurs to me that the twentieth one is the important one for if I am correct in my surmise, Idayah freed herself from prison at this time and hour in order to *prevent Starbuck from relating his story to me.*

"And if that is true, I am hurrying to him none too soon. Idayah escaped last night, at or about ten o'clock. It is now eleven o'clock in the morning. She has therefore been at liberty thirteen hours, or about that.

"But Starbuck is an athlete; he is a New Yorker; he is a man who should be supposed to be in no danger at any time, being thoroughly capable of taking care of himself under all conditions—and yet *Idayah has already established the fact that she is not only able to overcome him but that the mere sight of her beautiful face can so fill him with terror that it paralyzes his powers of resistance.*"

The carriage stopped before the apartment house, and the detective went inside.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNACCOUNTABLE DISAPPEARANCE.

The apartment house in which Starbuck had his rooms would have been more appropriately named a hotel. The ground floor was given up to office, café, dining-rooms, etc.

Nick Carter passed at once to the desk and asked if the clerk would announce him over the house telephone; and after a moment he was told, "You may go right up, Mr. Carter."

When Nick left the elevator and walked along the corridor toward Starbuck's room, he saw Starbuck's man, Ferguson, awaiting him in the open door; and as the detective approached, the latter said to him:

"I sent word for you to come right up, sir, because Mr. Starbuck has twice asked to see you this morning. But just now he is resting. I hope you won't mind waiting a few moments, before we awaken him."

"Not at all," replied the detective; and he was shown into the library, where he lighted a cigar and picked up a magazine.

Then he became interested in an article he found there, and was surprised presently when he discovered that it was twelve o'clock, and that an hour had passed since his arrival.

At once he rang for the valet.

"I think I have waited quite long enough, Ferguson," he said. "Much longer than I intended. Be good enough to tell your master that I am here."

Ferguson departed. He was gone possibly two or three minutes, when he came rushing back, wild-eyed and frightened.

"Mr. Starbuck is not in his room, sir!" he exclaimed.

"No? Then where is he?" demanded Nick.

"Alas, sir, I do not know. He has gone out—and yet I do not know how he could have done so without my knowledge. He cannot have gone very far."

"Why not?" asked the detective. "You say that he asked for me this morning. I know that he was anxious to see me. Possibly he has gone to my house."

"But that, sir, is impossible."

"Why is it impossible?"

"Because he was not dressed to go out. He was wearing slippers and smoking-jacket. He has not left them off; he has not taken his street dress, nor any part of it."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take me to his room at once."

Ferguson led the way rapidly to the room where Starbuck had been resting.

It was an ordinary sleeping-room—that is, for such an apartment. It was a large room, sumptuously furnished. There were three doors which opened from it. One of these opened upon the main corridor of the hotel, another gave access to a large bathroom; the third was that by which the detective, led by Ferguson, entered.

Through the bathroom one could pass to another room, which also gave access to the hall of the building.

Nick could see that Starbuck had been resting on a couch, which stood near the windows that looked out upon an unusually large court. A magazine was half-open and face down upon the floor, as if he had put it there when he became sleepy.

The indentation made by Starbuck's head against the pillow was plainly to be seen; a light rug, which Ferguson had put over his feet, had been idly kicked to the floor; there was no evidence anywhere that Starbuck had been startled into rising hastily.

But he was not in the room; he was nowhere in the apartment, for Ferguson lost no time in running from one room to another until he had searched them all; and then he returned and stood before the detective with a white, scared face.

"Well?" asked the detective.

"I cannot find him, sir," was the reply.

"Did you go outside into the hall?"

"No, sir. I looked out; that is all."

"Did Mr. Starbuck take his hat and coat?"

"No, sir. He has not taken anything with him. Every hat and cap that he owned is here. All his cloth-

ing is here. His shoes are in their accustomed places. He has taken nothing, not even a cane."

"Perhaps he has stepped into another apartment, on this floor, for a moment."

The valet shook his head.

"I do not think so, sir," he said.

"Why not?"

"To do so he would have passed through the room where I was seated waiting for him to waken, in order to tell him that you were here, sir."

Nick pointed toward the door that opened upon the hall.

"He might have gone out that way," he suggested.

"No, sir," said Ferguson. "Not once since we have lived here has that door been opened. If you will look at it, sir, you will see that the bolt lock is turned on the inside. There is no keyhole connecting with that bolt from the outside, and it is a common bolt—that is, it does not act as a spring lock."

"Then that door has not been opened?"

"No, sir."

"Isn't there another door into the hall from the room beyond the bathroom?"

"Yes, sir; but like this one, it was never used."

"Nevertheless, this occasion might have been an exception. We will have a look at it."

"You will find that it is bolted in the same way as this one, sir," said Ferguson, with conviction; and Nick glanced at the man searchingly, wondering why he had spoken with such certainty of being right.

And he did find that the door in question was locked as Ferguson said.

It was plain that Starbuck had not left his rooms by either of those doors, and there remained only two others by which he could have gone out. One of these opened from the room in which Ferguson had been seated, and was the general door of the apartment; the other opened from the room beyond the library and was used infrequently; moreover, to reach it, Starbuck would have been obliged to pass through the room where the detective was seated.

Certain it was that Starbuck had not left his apartment by either of the doors which the valet and Nick Carter could not have seen, for both were bolted on the inside by locks which were not practicable from the outside; certain it was that he had not gone through the door from the parlor into the hall, since he would have been obliged to pass Nick Carter to do so, and he had not done that. There remained, then, only the door into the hallway from the room in which Ferguson had been seated.

"He must have passed through that door," said the detective, pointing toward it.

"He did not," replied Ferguson emphatically.

"Did you drop asleep while you sat there?" asked Nick sternly.

"No, sir, I did not."

"Was your back turned toward the door at any time?"

"Not once, sir. I sat facing it all the while."

"What were you doing while you sat there?"

"Literally nothing."

"Were you reading?"

"No, sir."

"Had Mr. Starbuck any friends in other parts of the house with whom he was in the habit of visiting?"

"Several."

"Go to them while I wait here. Ask at each place where he might have gone if he has been seen. If you get an affirmative reply, say that I am awaiting him. If any one asks you why you are making the inquiries, say that there is a caller here waiting for Mr. Starbuck, and that he stepped out for a moment without telling you where he was going."

"But, Mr. Carter, he never went into the halls of this building in his life, in smoking-jacket and slippers."

"Never mind that. Do as I tell you."

"Yes, sir."

While Ferguson was absent Nick went through the apartment thoroughly. He examined every nook and corner of it, but he found nothing to attract his attention. When Ferguson returned the detective was standing in the same place where the valet had left him.

"Well?" he asked of the man.

"Nothing, sir."

"Nobody has seen him?"

"Nobody."

"Did you think to go to the office. I forgot to tell you to do that."

"Yes, sir; and I inquired of elevator boys and everybody I met outside. Mr. Starbuck has not been seen."

"But, confound it, Ferguson, *somebody* must have seen him!"

"Yes, sir. Quite so, sir. I think so, too, sir. *But nobody has.*"

"Ferguson?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has it occurred to you that I do not know positively that Mr. Starbuck was here in his rooms when I called?"

"Yes, sir."

"He might have been gone already. When you told me that he was here, and was resting, you might have been lying to me."

"I might have been lying, sir; but I was not."

"Oh, he might have gone out through the room in which you were seated, after my arrival, wishing to avoid me."

"He might have done so, sir, but he did not," was the quiet reply.

"He may have instructed you to tell me these stories.

and to get up all this disturbance over what appears to be an unaccountable disappearance."

"He might have done so, sir, and if he had done so I would have obeyed him implicitly. If he told me to lie to you, or to anybody, I would have done so. But he gave me no such order, and I have told you only the truth."

"All right, Ferguson; I believe you."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now carry your mind back to the moment of my announcement—to the moment when the clerk telephoned up from the office that I was here."

"Yes, sir."

"How long a time had elapsed, then, since you had seen your master?"

"Not to exceed ten minutes, sir."

"Are you quite positive of that?"

"Absolutely so, sir, for it was ten minutes before that time that I gave him some medicine—a tonic that the doctor prescribed for him to take three times a day."

"Did you take it into his room to give it to him, or did he come out after it?"

"He called to me, sir; and when I came out after he had taken it, he told me to close the door and not to disturb him for half an hour, as he felt inclined to sleep."

"Did the tonic he was in the habit of taking incline him to sleepiness?"

"Not at all, sir."

"And you believe yourself to be positive that the door which you closed between you and him, after you administered the medicine, was not opened again until I sent you to call him?"

"Yes, sir."

"But he must have passed through this way! He could not go up the chimney. The doors are locked on the inside, by which he might have gone out without passing through here; *and he is gone!*"

CHAPTER VI.

SURROUNDED BY MYSTERIES.

Ferguson remained silent at this. He did not know what to say.

He was thoroughly convinced in his own mind that Starbuck, his master, had not passed into, or through, the room in which he had been seated awaiting the time to call him—and he knew, as the detective also knew, that no human being could have passed through either of the available rooms and still have left them securely locked on the inside.

The chimney from the grate fireplace in the room was so small that a five-year-old boy could not have passed up or down through it, and the two windows which opened upon the large square court of the building were located on the fifteenth floor of a seventeen-story building.

"There is a way to the roof of the building, isn't there?" asked the detective suddenly.

"There is in the summer, sir. At this time of the year that way is kept closed and locked all the time."

Nick stepped to the windows, first to one and then to the other—threw them up and looked out upon the flagged court, where, during the summer, there were palms and rubber-plants galore, but which was so far below him that he closed the windows again and turned again toward the valet.

"Ferguson," he said, "when you gave Mr. Starbuck the medicine, what did you do?"

"I came back into this room, sir. I seated myself in that chair," and he pointed to the one chair he had indicated before.

"Where were you when the clerk rang the telephone to announce my presence?"

"Seated in that chair."

"You had not left it in the meantime?"

"No, sir."

"The telephone is in this room, I see."

"Yes, sir."

"When you heard the ring of the telephone bell, and answered it, what did you do then?"

"I waited a moment or two, until I thought it was time for you to reach this floor, sir, and then I stepped to that door and opened it. After that I stood upon the threshold, where you first saw me, waiting for you until you appeared. I did not move from that position until you came."

"Ferguson, I am about to ask you some rather strange questions."

"Yes, sir."

"You are to answer them as I ask them, and are not to ask questions in replying."

"Yes, sir."

"While you were seated in that chair, after you gave the medicine to your master, and until you were summoned to the telephone, did you experience any sensation of blindness? Do you remember to have experienced any sensation at all that was not perfectly natural?"

"No, sir."

"And you say that that period of time, until I came, was only ten minutes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, after I came—after you conducted me to the library and left me there—after you returned here and resumed your chair—had you any such sensation as I have described?"

"No, sir."

"You say that you were not reading; that you were doing literally nothing, to quote your own words?"

"Yes."

"Were your eyes opened, or closed?"

"They were open, sir."

"What were you looking at? I want a literal answer."

"At the wall. I was waiting. I am a servant who is accustomed to waiting. I sometimes sit in one position, waiting for my master, for hours at a time. That is my business. It is one of the duties for which I am engaged."

"I quite understand. Horses sometimes sleep on their feet. I have been told that they even sleep with their eyes open, although I don't believe it. Do you think that you could have dropped asleep without realizing that you had done so? Have you ever done such a thing, or been near to doing it, of your knowledge?"

"No, sir; never."

"Then we are boiled down to the fact that the only time when Mr. Starbuck could have gone out through that door was during the interval when you conducted me to the library."

"I have thought of that—but I do not believe it would have been possible for him or anybody to have opened that door and closed it again, or to have done either, without my knowing it."

"Neither do I. I think I would have know it myself. Nevertheless, he has gone out."

"You know, sir, that although I conducted you to the library, I stood aside for you to pass into the room, and I did not enter it myself."

"Yes."

"So I was not out of sight from this door for an instant."

"No."

"It is true that my back was turned toward the door for a moment; but it was only during the time that was required to walk thirty feet; it could not have been five seconds of time, sir."

"I quite agree with you, Ferguson."

"If you will try the door, sir, and open it for yourself, you will observe that it resists the first effort; that it opens rather hard, and that there is a distinct sound made in opening it, a sound which cannot be avoided. I tried to avoid it when I opened the door to admit you, in order that my master would not be disturbed, but I found that notwithstanding my care, I made some noise. I think it is fully, sir, if you will excuse me, to suppose that Mr. Starbuck could have gone out through that door without the knowledge of either of us, during the time I was conducting you to the library. You were nearer to the door than I was, since you were behind me. You would have heard it if I did not. And when I stood aside to allow you to pass into the library I would have seen a person at this door."

"Your arguments are unanswerable, Ferguson; and *yet the incontrovertible fact remains that Gerald Starbuck has gone from these rooms.*"

"Yes, sir. It is more of that witchery, sir, to my way of thinking."

"Witchery? What witchery?"

"There has been witchery surrounding us ever since that unfortunate occurrence at the Garden, sir, when my master later on met with the misfortune of being drugged. He has never been the same since that time, sir."

"Tell me what witchery you refer to, Ferguson."

"First, sir, you must not forget that I am of Scotch descent. As a Scotchman, I am inclined to the uncanny side of things, sir. If there is a mystery, I am inclined to attribute it to supernatural causes. That is my inheritance. I remind you of this, sir, so that you will take what I have to say with a grain of salt, for I do not wish to influence your judgment, sir, which I probably could not do in any case; but, more than that, I don't wish you to think me a driveling fool or an unconscionable ass."

"Very good, Ferguson. With all that preamble, I think I can listen to what you have to say. Now tell me to what mysteries you refer."

"In the first place, sir, I do not believe that my master was suffering from the effects of any kind of a drug, during the time that he has been—not ill, sir, but requiring care. I do not believe it, notwithstanding the fact that the best doctors in New York have stated that he was."

"Well?"

"I have believed—I still believe—that his trouble was mental."

"Do you mean that your master was losing his reason?"

"No, sir. Not at all. Not that. I believe that his mind was dominated by some other mind. I do not mean hypnotism, either, but something that may be akin to it. I think he was in a state of suspense, of fear, of dread, of terror—if you can conceive of such a man as Mr. Starbuck, who was never afraid of anything since I have known him, experiencing terror."

"Go on. You haven't got to the mysteries yet."

"No, sir; but I am coming to them."

"Well?"

"You are aware that we have been in the country, sir?"

"Yes."

"At Mr. Starbuck's estate, up the Hudson."

"Yes."

"It is a large house, left to him by his father; a large estate."

"Yes, I know. I have been there, Ferguson."

"Then you are more or less familiar with the interior plan of the house."

"Yes."

"Last summer Mr. Starbuck made some alterations in the general arrangements. He caused the east wing to be renovated, and since then he has occupied that part of the mansion for his own particular rooms."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, my first astounding statement is this: Three separate times since we have been there on this trip I have heard—and distinctly heard—my master in conversation with another person in his own private room at a time when I knew him to be alone. I——"

"Hold on, Ferguson. If you knew him to be alone he could not have held such a conversation; that is, if there were two distinct voices."

"There were two distinct voices. More than that, one of the voices belonged to a woman—the other was, of course, my master's."

"Then you did not know him to be alone; you only supposed him to be alone."

"Pardon me. I knew him to be alone; and on each occasion I afterward proved it to be the case."

"You mean by entering the room where you heard the voices?"

"By entering the room from whence the voices proceeded, as soon as it was possible to do so, by asking my master who was with him, and receiving the reply, in a surprised tone, that nobody had been with him; by telling him that I had heard voices, and being told in reply that I was mistaken, for the reason that he had not made a sound."

"What have you been drinking lately, Ferguson?"

"I was afraid that you would ask that, sir. I am sorry that you do not believe me, but I am perfectly sincere. Besides, that is not all."

"What more, then?"

"There have been notes received by him very strangely."

"Notes? Letters? Do you mean that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me about that part of your experiences."

"The messages have been left for him very strangely and very mysteriously. He would find one under his plate after I had laid the table for his breakfast. He would find one lying upon the pillow of his bed when he went to it to retire. He would find one in the middle of the floor of his morning-room, where he used to sit and smoke."

"Did you ever happen to see the contents of one of these messages, Ferguson?"

"No, sir. I will admit that, for his sake, I often wished that I could do so, and, had there been an opportunity, I would not have hesitated to take advantage of it. But he always destroyed them, and attended to the burning of them himself, as soon as he had read their contents."

"And what remarks did he make to you about them, Ferguson?"

"None at all, sir. Of course, I could not ask him about them, and he told me nothing. I only know that always when he received them he seemed afraid, frightened, and that he would lock himself in his room alone afterward."

CHAPTER VII.

DEALING WITH THE UNEXPLAINABLE.

"Now, let us return for a moment to the sound of those voices you heard. After that we will discuss the letters."

"Yes, sir."

"At what hours of the day have you noticed them, altogether?"

"Always in the morning, sir."

"At what hour in the morning?"

"About eleven. Now that I think of it, eleven o'clock in the morning has always seemed a mysterious kind of time for him, especially since that baron was killed at the Garden."

"How do you mean—mysterious?"

"It has been the hour when he seemed to desire to be alone. Now that I think of it, he has systematically gotten rid of me at about that hour ever since that man was killed."

"This morning included, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"At times when you believed that you heard voices, were you at any time able to distinguish any part or parts of the conversation?"

"Never a word of it; only that was not because I could not hear the words, sir; it was because I could not understand them."

"Do you mean that they were uttered in a tongue that you could not comprehend? That they spoke in a language that was unknown to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you speak French?"

"Yes, sir, indifferently well."

"Spanish?"

"No, sir."

"Yet, if you should happen to hear two persons conversing in Spanish, you would know in what language they were talking, wouldn't you?"

"Easily."

"Very well; in what language did those voices converse?"

"I do not know. In a language that I have never heard on any other occasion."

"Did Mr. Starbuck seem to talk it readily?"

"Perfectly, I should say."

"You say that you were able to hear the words dis-

tinctly—that is, plainly enough so you might have understood them had you been familiar with the language?"

"Yes."

"Can you remember one or more of the words to repeat it or them to me?"

"No. I could not. That would be impossible."

"And are you quite sure that one of the voices belonged to a woman?"

"Certainly. I could not be mistaken about that."

"In what room did those conversations take place usually?"

"Always in the same room, sir. The room which we called his den; a private sitting-room, into which no stranger was ever admitted."

"And how was, or is, that room located as to the others near it?"

"All of those rooms are in the east wing of the building, sir. The mansion, as you know, is very large."

"Yes."

"The east wing is detached from the house really. It is in reality a separate building, connected with the main building by a reach that is between them. The private sitting-room, in which I heard the voices, is at the southeast corner, on the second floor. The bedroom adjoins it on one side, a dressing-room on the other side. It would have been easy enough for a person so minded to have entered or left the room from the outside, by way of the balcony, if that is what you mean by your question. It is the fact that Mr. Starbuck always asserted that he had been alone all the time, and, not only that, but that he had made no sound at all, that has made it a mystery to me."

"Now, as to the letters."

"Yes, sir."

"You say that he found them awaiting him in different places, and at widely different hours of the day. I understand. For example, he would find one at the breakfast-table, another on his pillow at night, when he was about to retire. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Have you, or had you ever any idea how the letters got to the places where they were discovered?"

"None at all, sir. I could never understand it in the least."

"Might not one of the servants of the house have been bribed to leave the letters where they were found?"

"I do not think so; but if that were supposedly true, the fact remains that the letters were found, at times, in places to which the other servants did not have access."

"Now, let me remind you of some things you have said, and afterward, ask you a question."

"Yes, sir."

"You have said that the letters were found at different times and in different places; you have stated that always, after receiving them, it was the habit of Mr. Starbuck to lock himself in that private sitting-room which was called the den; and you have asserted that whenever you heard the voices it always happened at about eleven o'clock in the morning; you have also stated that your master has taken up the habit of being alone at that hour, every day; is all that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you associated the letters with the voices? That is, the writer of the letters with the owner of the second voice in that room?"

"Certainly."

"Does the number of letters received agree with the number of times you have heard the voices in conversation in that room?"

"No. Not at all."

"What is the discrepancy?"

"There have been more than twice as many letters as there have been times when I have heard the voices."

"Might there not have been occasions when those conversations have taken place without your knowledge?"

"That is possible, sir. But not in that room or at that hour. I was always on the watch after I heard the talk the first time."

"Did you make inquiries among the other servants at any of those times relative to the presence of a stranger or strangers about the place?"

"Several times; every time until I became convinced in my own mind that it was no human being that he talked with."

"Oh! You became convinced of that, did you?"

"Thoroughly so, sir."

"You speak as if there was some other method of convincing you, than merely your inability to explain the phenomenon."

"There was."

"And what was that?"

"There never was the sign of a track of any kind left in the grounds around the house. I know, because I took pains to verify the fact."

"How did you do it?"

"I several times sprinkled the ground around under the balcony of that wing with different things that would have left traces of the presence of a human foot there, or which would have been tracked upon the piazza if a person had stepped upon it. I used precipitated-chalk, talcum-powder, and corn-starch. Other things, too. Besides, I have placed myself on the watch from early morning until eleven o'clock, and never during that time been out of sight of the grounds beneath his windows, and then at eleven I would listen at the door and hear the voices."

"Did you never attempt to enter that room stealthily at such times?"

"Often."

"And never succeeded?"

"Never. The door was always securely locked at such times."

"But you say that you have entered the room immediately after hearing the voices."

"The door would be unlocked as soon as the voices ceased."

"Do you mean that you could hear when it was unlocked?"

"I don't remember that I did or did not. I only know that I have gone into the room at such times, almost immediately after the voices ceased, and found my master quietly asleep on the couch, and no one there but him. And that then, when I awakened him, he would deny that anybody had been there, or that he had made any sort of noise at all."

"I suppose that accounts for your readiness to believe that your master had finally disappeared when we discovered that he was not in his room just now."

"Yes, sir. I have been prepared for such a thing as this—for a long time."

"You admit that you are superstitious, Ferguson, but you have not admitted that you are in any way afraid of these mysteries."

"No, sir. I am not afraid. I think when I was made nerves were left out. I have never in my life been conscious of fearing anything at all."

"That is good; and it is rather remarkable, too. Now, you never caught so much as a glimpse of that woman of the manor-house, did you?"

"Never."

"And you could never induce your master to speak of her?"

"Never."

"You were not with your master when he went to India the last time, were you?"

"I was in his employ, but I did not go with him."

"Has he ever discussed that trip with you? Has he ever told you anything at all about it, or in regard to the adventures he met with?"

"He has told me a great deal about it, but I have always fancied that there was a chapter of it which he never referred to."

"Why have you thought that?"

"Because several times, when speaking of that trip, he has started to touch upon a part of the subject which he had evidently determined not to speak about; at such times he would stop abruptly and leave the subject altogether."

"Has he ever mentioned a place he found there that is called the 'Sacred Valley'?"

"No."

"Or a country called Nepaul?"

"I do not remember that he has done so."

"Or a strange people he encountered while he was on that trip? A people with hair so blonde that it is almost white, but still with brilliant black eyes and beautiful features—what is the matter with you, Ferguson?"

"I was wondering, sir; your words brought something to my mind."

"Brought what to your mind?"

"Why, sir, the fact that every time I went out of the house, while we were at the manor, I encountered upon the street just such a person as you have described. She——"

"*She?* Was it a woman?"

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir."

"But the woman in this case—the one I am talking about, should have been tightly locked in prison at that time."

"Nevertheless, sir, it was a woman, and she had hair and eyes such as you have described. I supposed at first that the hair was of the sort that is called prematurely white, but I found out differently, sir. I found out differently."

CHAPTER VIII.

ONLY ONE WAY OUT.

"What do you mean—that you found out differently?"

"I mean that I grew tired of meeting her continually, and having her stare me out of countenance with her great, big, black eyes, and one day I stopped her, and I said, rather sharply: 'Madam, a woman of your age ought to be ashamed of herself to be making eyes at a man in my position, the way you do;' for there was no mistaking it, sir; that was what she had been doing, and I hate that kind of a huzzy."

"Well?" said the detective, laughing. "What did she say to that?"

"She just looked me straight in the face and laughed at me; and I saw that she was not only young, but very beautiful; and then she said to me: 'Ferguson, you're a fool!' just like that she said it. And then she shrugged her shoulders and passed on again before I could reply to her. But I doubt if I should have done so anyhow, I was that amazed at her."

"Were those the only words you ever had with her?"

"Yes."

"And all that you know about her?"

"Yes."

"When were the first and the last times you ever saw her up there?"

"The first day we were there and the last day we were there."

"And every day between?"

"Nearly so. Every day that I went outside. One might almost have supposed that she was watching for

now, although after that time, when I spoke to her, she never seemed to see me at all."

"When you did encounter her, was it when you were leaving the house or when you were returning to it?"

"When I was leaving."

"And how long were you usually away at such times?"

"Not to exceed two hours; rarely more than an hour."

"How did your master seem to you on your return from those absences?"

"The same as usual, sir. Why?"

"Because I think it likely that the white-headed woman was watching for you to go out, in order that she might call upon Mr. Starbuck."

"I don't see it that way, sir, at all. If Mr. Starbuck were an invalid or a helpless gentleman, or if he were less master of himself and of all who serve him, I should not wonder at such a suggestion, possibly; but as it stands, I have served him a good many years, and I have never known him not to do anything he wished to do for the mere reason that he feared the comments of others. I don't think he cared anything at all about the opinion of what he called the world. If he had wanted to receive a lady in his rooms—I say, if he had *wanted* to do such a thing, he would have done it without asking anybody's permission, or without attempting to disguise the fact that he had done so. He wouldn't have asked my leave about it, nor would he have taken the trouble to hide the facts from me.

"And another thing, too, sir. If anybody had watched for my going away in order to go to my master—well, while that might have been easy enough, it wouldn't have been healthy for that person, man or woman, if my master objected. He would not have hesitated.

"And now, sir, that is all I know about the affairs of Mr. Starbuck. I think that he has become involved in some way with something that is supernatural. Say what you please, and think what you please, that is my belief."

"He has gone out of these rooms in a most mysterious manner. He weighed considerably more than two hundred pounds; he is more than six feet tall; he is as strong as three or four ordinary men; he is afraid of nothing—at least, I never saw him give evidence of any fear, only when he received those mysterious letters."

"But you think he was afraid of them, do you?"

"I think he dreaded them. I won't say more than that. But I was going to say that, with his weight and size and strength and fearlessness of spirit, it has required something more than merely natural causes to exit him away in this manner. He couldn't go through the keyhole, nor up the chimney, nor out at the window——"

Nick held up one hand and stopped the man in his talk. Then he passed into the adjoining room, and, again raising first one window and then the other, he examined the casings carefully, and once more looked out upon the court so far below where he stood.

Then he raised his eyes and studied the edges of the roof where it projected over the court, two and a half stories higher up.

"Ferguson," he said, turning back again and closing the window, "I want you to go to the office and ask the manager of the building if he will kindly come up here for a little while. You need say nothing to him in reference to Mr. Starbuck."

Ferguson, rather rebuked for his discursiveness, hastened away without a word, and while he was gone Nick again inspected the room where he was—the room from which Starbuck had disappeared.

If he had uttered his thoughts aloud as he started to do that, he would have said:

"There should have been one of those mysterious notes described by Ferguson received by Starbuck this morning, if my idea is a correct one. It should have been found by Starbuck immediately after he dismissed Ferguson—or immediately before he called him into the room to give the order that he was not to be disturbed.

"In either case, he hardly had the time or the opportunity to destroy that note. If he destroyed it, there should be evidence of the fact here; if he did not take it with him when he went away the note should be here somewhere now—*and there must have been such a note if the theory that has occurred to me is the correct one.*"

He searched the room eagerly and rapidly, but without result.

There was a small desk in one corner, and he went through that. The bureau he served in the same manner; he opened the books, expecting that something would drop from between the leaves of one of them.

Nothing whatever came of his search, and at last he stepped back into the middle of the floor and stood there with his eyes fixed upon the couch where Starbuck had been lying.

"He was lying on that couch," mused the detective. "He dismissed Ferguson because he was expecting a visit from his—from the writer of the notes; from the same person who has visited him before, at the manor, or more probably from Idayah herself this time.

"Lying upon that couch and expecting her momentarily—perhaps terribly dreading the coming, it would be natural that he should read the note again.

"Now, I know that he was not alone more than ten minutes, so it is probable that while he was rereading that note he heard her approach. Where? At the door? At the window? I won't attempt to reply to those questions just yet.

"But, hearing her approach, his first act was to conceal the note—an act that was the result of habit, lest another than the writer should find and read one of them.

"Now, seeking to rid himself of the note very quickly, what would he do with it? The answer is obvious to one who is standing here. I wonder that I wasted my time in searching elsewhere in the room."

He stepped forward with two quick strides, bent over the couch, and from between the upholstery of the back and the seat of the couch at about the middle of the length of it the detective drew forth a folded slip of paper—a slip that was tightly folded inside an envelope, the whole being of very thin paper.

Drawing out the slip, the detective gazed upon it in the utmost perplexity, for, although there was unmistakably writing upon it, he could not read it.

Even the characters with which the words were formed were unknown to him; the whole was in a language that he had never heard of before, and written with an alphabet which was as entirely unknown.

Possibly it resembled Arabic more than anything else—and yet it was not Arabic.

"And the trouble is," he thought to himself, as he gazed upon the strange writing, which had been done with a red crayon, "that it is doubtful if in all this country I can find a person who could translate it for me. Anyhow, I will keep it."

He placed it carefully in a compartment of his pocketbook just as Ferguson returned, accompanied by the manager of the hotel apartments.

"Mr. Blessington," said the detective, "I have some startling news for you. Mr. Starbuck has mysteriously disappeared from his rooms here, and almost before our eyes. Ferguson is of the opinion that supernatural forces have been at work, but you and I will not adopt that theory. I do think, however, that natural forces have been employed which are so entirely unfamiliar to us that we might well regard them as supernatural. I want you to promise me to keep it all a secret from everybody. Will you do that?"

"Why, yes; I suppose so. But——"

"Never mind the buts just at present. Ferguson and I know that Mr. Starbuck was in this room at one moment, and, figuratively, was gone the next moment. We know that he did not pass through any of the doors into the hall; we know that he could not go up the chimney, or through the keyholes, and therefore there remains only one method of exit from here that was at all possible."

"I confess, Mr. Carter, that I don't see that there is any other."

"There are the windows, Mr. Blessington."

"Bless my soul! We are sixteen stories from the ground——"

"And two from the roof. If the windows were employed—and there seems to be no doubt of that now—the exit was made by way of the roof."

"But, even so, Mr. Carter——"

"Well?"

"It would have been necessary that he should descend through the building. There is no other roof as high as this one nearer than the *Times* building, and that is very far away. He could not have gone out that way without returning through the building in order to reach the street, and *why should he have done such a thing at all?*"

"We cannot reply to the whys and wherefores just now. The one thing that we do know is that he is gone. I want you to take me to the roof."

"How could he get to the roof, Mr. Carter? How could he get to the roof from one of those windows?"

"It has not occurred to me that he could do so without assistance," replied the detective. "My own idea—I need not tell you just why at the present time—is that he was *taken* to the roof through one of those windows."

"Taken to the roof! Do you mean that, Mr. Carter, the whole thing is so utterly absurd that I am compelled to laugh."

"Nevertheless you will admit that he has gone somewhere."

"I will admit that you say so."

"Sir, I——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Carter, I did not intend any reflection upon your statement. What I meant was that Mr. Starbuck is probably at this moment enjoying a cigar with one of his friends in another part of the house."

"All right. You forget that he could not leave the rooms without our knowledge—Ferguson's and mine—save by one of those two windows. Have you a means of access to the roof? I mean have you the keys with you?"

"Yes."

"Then if you will kindly conduct me there, I have no doubt that we will discover some sort of evidence to prove that he has been there. Come."

"It is so utterly preposterous, you know; but, of course, I will take you there. But how do you suppose he got off the roof, if once he got upon it? He had no key. There is no way of making oneself heard from there. Come, I will take you to the roof, and then we will return here, and I will have a systematic search made through the house for Mr. Starbuck."

"I think," said the detective, "that you will not find it necessary to do that. I think the roof will have a story to tell us."

CHAPTER IX.

TRACKS IN THE SNOW AND THE LETTER ON THE ROOF.

The time of year was the first week in December. There had been a slight fall of snow during the preceding night, and, although this had entirely disappeared from the streets of the city, it still remained, like a deep

snow blanket-covering, upon the roofs of the houses and buildings of the city.

Nick, who had taken the key from the hand of Manager Blessington, himself opened the door which admitted them to the roof, and then, with a signal to the others to wait, he stood there for a long time, carefully studying the general appearance of things in front of him.

The roof was perfectly flat, save for the numerous, carbuncle-like projections from the top of it such as one will discover upon the summit of any of the tall buildings in New York.

These are chimneys, ventilators, water-tanks, and other devices which go toward the requisitions of such a place.

Over all was a delicate covering of snow, which did not exceed in depth an eighth of an inch, but which was as telltale a tracking space as could well be imagined.

It was instantly evident to the detective that somebody or something had been there, and had left traces of their presence, but the tracks were not at all what Nick Carter expected to find, and he studied the things he saw with a puzzled expression on his face that would have amused any one of his assistants could one of them have seen it.

The court in the center of the building has been partly described. It should be said now that the building itself occupied an entire city block, so called, and that the court was very large and formed a huge oblong square. This had been a part of the general plan in order that the tenants of the house might have rooms which, while located away from the noises of the street, were yet even more light and airy and pleasant to look from, than were the windows which fronted on the avenues and streets.

The entrance from the stairway to the roof was under a hood, and the opening of this hood faced the court, the detective judged, directly over the place where the windows of Starbuck's rooms were located, and was perhaps thirty feet distant from the edge of it.

Looking upon the snow on the roof, from this vantage-point, the detective discovered the following puzzling things which caused that corrugated expression on his brow:

To the right of where he stood—where there was a very large open space of roof—were two sets of parallel lines with cross-bars between each set, which were about sixteen inches apart, and with other cross-bars from one set to the other, which were perhaps ten feet apart.

The impressions left upon the snow were exactly as if some thirty foot ladders had been put down there in the snow, side by side, parallel with each other, and about ten feet apart from their outer sides—and as if the two ladders were connected each with the other by cross-bar ladders, which had also rested upon the snow.

It is necessary that the reader should understand as perfectly as possible exactly how these tracks in the snow appeared; therefore:

Imagine, if you can, a bare space of perfectly level snow; imagine yourself in possession of two common ladders, each thirty feet in length, and made with the rounds sixteen inches apart; imagine these ladders placed parallel with each other upon that stretch of snow, at a distance apart of ten feet; imagine them connected with each other by stretchers, four in number—that is, one at either end and others at distances of ten feet from either end. If you can see that in your mind's eye you will see exactly what Nick Carter discovered when he pushed open that door to the roof and stood upon the threshold looking out.

Now again: Place yourself in that doorway looking toward the court; imagine that you see directly in front of you, and, pointing toward the edge of the roof, the imprints already described—*and nothing else.*

That was the circumstance.

There was not a trace of a footprint anywhere; there was not another mar upon the surface of the snow save those already mentioned; the door from the interior of the building to the roof was not only locked when Nick approached it from the inside, but it was also bolted, so that nobody could have passed out through it unless that person had entered the building again and refastened the door on the inside; and nobody could have passed into the building from the roof unless somebody had been there at the door to admit that person.

And yet, there were the strange-looking tracks in the snow, appearing as if they were the result of the presence there of two ladders; yet, there was the certainty that those tracks had been made there since daylight that morning; yet there was the certainty, as Blessington informed the detective in reply to a question, that nobody had been out of that door to the roof in weeks; and there was also the certainty that the tracks could not have been made where they were without human agency.

From where the detective stood they pointed directly at the edge of the roof over the court, and also over the windows to the apartment of Gerald Starbuck.

It looked as if the ladders had been placed there by somebody who had used them to avoid making tracks in the snow; it looked as if those ladders had supported some sort of a platform, upon which that person had walked, in order to make it possible to reach the windows of Starbuck's apartment.

But where were the ladders now? What had become of them?

They were not upon the roof. There was nothing upon the roof that was movable.

It was against the ordinances of the city, and also the rules of the building, to leave any article upon the roof which might be blown into the street and endanger life; anyhow, there was nothing there—*there were no ladders there!*

There were absolutely no other traces of any kind upon the soft snow, which would have taken the slightest impression, and preserved it, too.

"What in the world are you looking at?" asked Blessington, at last, and with considerable impatience; and the detective without replying, pointed toward the tracks in the snow—the tracks of the mysterious ladders.

"Hello!" exclaimed the manager. "That is funny, isn't it? Nobody but Simpkins, our engineer, could have done that, and Simpkins hasn't been up here, I know—not in a long time."

"But those tracks were made where you see them since daylight this morning," said the detective.

"It looks as if a pair of ladders had been laid down there, doesn't it?" murmured the manager.

"Yes," admitted the detective.

"We don't own such a pair of ladders as that would have made, Carter; and, anyhow, they wouldn't go down through this stairway, if we did have them."

"That is true," said the detective. "They were too long."

"Very much too long. And nobody has been up here. I am sure of that. It is against orders, you know. Nobody can come here, after the way is closed, without my personal permission. But there are the tracks."

"Yes; there are the tracks."

"How do you account for them, Carter?"

"I haven't accounted for them—yet."

Ferguson, who had accompanied them to the top of the stairs, now made his voice heard.

"Mr. Carter," he said, "when I was telling you about the mysterious happenings at the manor, and about my search for the tracks of some person or persons there—you remember?"

"Yes."

"I did not think it necessary to tell you that I had seen just such tracks there as these."

"You just mean, Ferguson, that you have seen just such tracks as these there at the manor?"

"Yes, sir. Once."

"When was that?"

"One morning—no, it was afternoon, but it was after a light fall of snow. The tracks were upon the roof of the mansion, too, just as these are upon the roof. You know, sir, that the manor-house is not exactly flat roofed—but it is almost flat, declining from the middle, where there is a cupola, to the eaves at each of the four sides. You remember?"

"Yes."

"When I first entered the service of Mr. Starbuck we lived a great deal of the time at the manor, and I used to like to stay in that cupola as much as possible. I even fixed it up inside as a sort of place of retreat, when I was not employed at other things. The notion struck me to go up there one afternoon, while we were there this last time, and upon looking out of the window I saw just such tracks as those are upon the roof. I thought nothing of it at the time—had entirely forgotten the incident, in fact, and I doubt if it would ever have occurred to me again if the sight of these, so exactly like them, had not reminded me of the circumstance."

"You say that those tracks were exactly like these, Ferguson?"

"Yes, sir."

"In every particular?"

"Yes, sir. Even to the regularity of those cross-bars, which seem to extend between the impressions of the two ladders."

"You say that you discovered the tracks upon the roof of the manor, one afternoon. Now, was it one of the afternoons *after* you had heard the voices in conversation in your master's room?"

"Yes, sir. It was."

"Very good. Now excuse me a moment, Blessington. Remain where you are, if you please, until I take a little look around me on the roof. Then we will go below again."

Careless now of how he obliterated the traces of the "ladders," the detective stepped out from the doorway and walked to the edge of the roof, and there he got down upon his knees in the snow for a moment and leaned over so that he could see into the court below him. He remained in that position a little while, and then he rose slowly to his feet and returned to the doorway, where the others were awaiting him.

"I think we will return now," he said.

"What have you found out, Mr. Carter?" asked the manager.

"I have found out—nothing," was the reply.

"But I can see by your face that you have an idea; that all this is not so much a mystery to you as it was at first; that somehow the words that Ferguson said to you have put you on the right track for an explanation of the mystery."

"You are right, Blessington; but I am not ready to tell you my conjectures as yet. For, after all, there are nothing more than conjectures, now. Come; let us return to Starbuck's rooms. We will do our talking there, if there is any more talking to do. It is cold up here."

In silence they made their way back to the apartment; in silence they entered; in silence they halted, each staring at the same object that awaited them there.

It was lying in the middle of the floor as they entered the apartment, and each of the men who saw it knew that it had not been there when they went out; each one knew that in some mysterious manner it had been placed where it was since they left that room.

And the object itself? It was a square sheet of paper with writing upon it—writing that had been done in red crayon; and by red crayon is meant that it might have been done with an ordinary red pencil such as children use for coloring pictures in books.

But the writing was in the unmistakable chirography of Gerald Starbuck; Nick Carter realized that before he took the sheet of paper from the floor. It was badly written, as if he had done it in haste, and with no conveniences, such as a table, for instance, to rest the paper upon while he wrote; but the signature was unmistakably Starbuck's.

The detective read aloud what was written:

"'FERGUSON: I shall be absent for an indefinite time. You are to remain in charge of my effects, and of these rooms, until you hear from me again. There is sufficient cash in my desk to keep you going until you do hear from me. GERALD STARBUCK.'"

CHAPTER X.

THE ONLY EXPLANATION POSSIBLE.

"This sheet of paper has been folded twice," said the detective, at last. "It was folded as if to go into an envelope, and was afterward opened and left open here, upon the floor, in order to attract attention the moment anybody—Ferguson—entered the room. I want you both to remain here until I return. I will make my own inquiries this time."

He left the room without another word, and hurried to the elevator. In the cage as he descended he happened to be the only passenger, and so he questioned that elevator man at once.

"Have you happened to let a stranger off at that floor within the last fifteen minutes?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. A tall, dark man, who asked for Mr. Starbuck, and said he was expected. I had to point out Mr. Starbuck's door to him, as he said he didn't know where it was."

At the ground floor Nick hurried to the office desk. To the clerk he said:

"Was there some one here a few moments ago who asked for Mr. Starbuck?"

"Yes," replied the clerk. "He did not stop at the desk, but walked directly to the elevator and went up. When that elevator came down again, I asked what the stranger wanted, and was told that he had gone to Mr. Starbuck's rooms, having said that he was expected. He went out within a few minutes. I saw him pass the office. Was Mr. Starbuck annoyed? I am very sorry, but the man got past me, and went up before I had a chance to stop him."

"Oh, there is no harm done at all," replied Nick. "He missed Mr. Starbuck, that is all. You are sure that he went out again?"

"Yes."

"How long ago?"

"Less than ten minutes."

"Did you see him plainly enough so that you can describe him to me?"

"In a general way, yes. He was tall and dark; looked like a foreigner. In fact, all he needed to resemble a Hindu was a turban; but he was dressed like an American, hat and all. He was rather a handsome man, and a gentleman, I thought. There was a suggestion of the 'distinguished' about him."

"Thank you," said the detective; and he returned to the elevator.

Up-stairs he said to Manager Blessington:

"There seems to be no mystery about the leaving of the letter on the floor. There was a man here who came up to this floor while we were on the roof. He brought the letter, and left it where Ferguson could find it. Probably Starbuck had provided the man with a key to

the apartment, and when he rang and there was no answer, he merely opened the door and left the letter where we discovered it. Now, Blessington?"

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

"You have heard me read that letter, and you know that Starbuck's signature is appended to it, don't you?"

"Yes."

"And we both realize now that there is a mystery connected with this affair, eh?"

"Yes. I should say so!"

"I have for a long time been aware that there was a mystery of some kind mixed up in the life of Gerald Starbuck. Once he started to tell me all about it, but he was interrupted before he had told anything of importance, so I am practically as much in the dark as you are. But this letter tells us that at least he has not been injured. In some mysterious manner, which we are unable to explain, he has been spirited away from his rooms, and we can find no trace of him for the present; but we know from this note that he is in his right mind, in full possession of his senses, and that he at least believes himself to be in no immediate danger, for he speaks of writing to Ferguson again very soon."

"Yes."

"I have gone into all this preamble because I wish to ask you to keep absolutely silent in regard to the strange happenings of this day. Keep the information to yourself. Do not tell the clerks, even. Ferguson will remain here in charge, and he will inform people who inquire for his master that he is out of town for a time. Let it go at that. Will you?"

"Yes."

"But, all the same, keep carefully on the watch—*and Ferguson will do the same.* Have any and every person who asks for Starbuck carefully watched—only I doubt very much if anybody who is associated with this affair will appear here again, now that Ferguson has received his instructions."

"But, I say, Carter!"

"Yes."

"It isn't fair, you know, to leave me utterly in the dark like this. I want this affair explained. Those tracks in the snow on the roof, and all that. Starbuck's flying out through the window like a bird or a carrier-pigeon, and all that."

"My dear fellow, I am as much in the dark as you are. When I get into the light—that is, when I know how to explain these mysteries, I promise you that you shall be told. Until that time, you must do as I do—have patience and wait."

Then the detective turned to Ferguson.

"You have told me," he said, "that you are never afraid; so I wish you to remain here in these rooms until further orders from me. I mean, do not leave the building unless it is imperative that you should do so, and do not leave the rooms more than is necessary. If you should be obliged to go out, leave a note for me about it, exactly where we found this one—in the middle of the floor. And you may give me an extra key to this apartment, so that I can enter when I please, in case you are not here."

The detective was in the street ten minutes after that, but he did not pause there or turn his glance to the right or the left as he hurried homeward—and when he got there he called his first assistant into the study with him and closed the door.

"Chick," he said, smiling. "I have run up against a very interesting and a very incomprehensible puzzle, and as is my usual habit I am going to use you as a 'testing-out' machine. That is, I shall want you to take the opposite side of every argument that I advance and do your utmost to beat me in the argument at that. Now, as soon as I have given a few long distance orders over the telephone I will talk with you."

His first call was for Pittsfield, Massachusetts—for the headquarters there of the Aero Club; afterward he called up the justly celebrated Doctor Thomas, in New Jersey; and after that he called one after another, each headquarters, and each man of prominence which was and who was in any way associated with any form of ballooning—with any form of aeroplaning, or lighter than air and heavier than air navigation.

Of each of these he asked a stated set of questions, which he prepared while he waited for the answer to his first call; and they were as follows:

"I am Nick Carter. I am interested in a mystery in which I think that a balloon or some sort of a flying machine has figured. I wish replies to the following questions, and I give the assurance that there shall be no publicity whatever in connection with the case, or with the information you give me, unless I have your full permission. The questions are:

"What balloons are in commission now, and where are they located?

"What and where are such that could be put in commission and used within a few hours?

"The same two questions apply to aeroplanes.

"The same to any form of flying-machine.

"What inventors do you know about, and where are they located, who are now engaged upon work of this sort, who may be engaged in making experiments?

"What information have you that would cover any of these questions?

"Have you seen or known of any recent remarkable flights?

"Have you seen or have you heard that there has been seen in the air at any place, recently, an unknown flying-machine?

"Have you any information at all which would aid me in the inquiries I am making, the general drift of which you can understand from the queries I have made?

"I have numbered my questions. Please reply by number when you answer, and have the expense charged to me at this end.

"A letter will be dictated and sent to you at once, fully explaining the reasons for these questions."

During the intervals of waiting the detective talked with his assistant; and here is a record of that frequently interrupted talk:

"Chick," he said, "we are up against it again in the Idayah case. Rollins, a turnkey, appeared here this morning with the information that Idayah had escaped from prison by the use of that same strange powder that she once blinded me with. There isn't much mystery about that part of it, for it has long been understood that some of the East Indian jugglers know how to manufacture a powder which, being scattered in the air, renders everything about it invisible for a short space of time. It can only be used where there is no air stirring, and it soon settles. It is not about that that I wish to talk.

"But Gerald Starbuck, against whom Idayah seems to have been conducting a campaign, solely—it would appear—because he has knowledge of the secrets of her native country, that is located somewhere in Nepaul, has disappeared.

"He disappeared in a mysterious manner, from his own rooms, to-day. There was no way in which he could have done this, no possible way in which he could have left them, save by one of the windows which are located eleven stories above the ground, and two stories below the roof of the building. You know the house?"

"Yes."

"The 'disappearing powder,' if I may call it that, could not have played a part in this affair, and, therefore, Starbuck went out through the window.

"On the roof of the building where Starbuck lives a light fall of snow is resting. In the snow there are no tracks save those which might have been left by a couple of ladders, placed side by side there—or by some sort of a flying-machine which alighted there.

"There are no such ladders in the building or on the roof; no such ladders could have been taken into the building, or upon the roof, without the knowledge of the people in the building, and there are no footprints of man or woman upon the roof, and hence the act was done by some sort of a flying-machine. There is no other explanation. Now, what do you say to that?"

"I say that it is absurd."

"Twenty-five years ago, if you had been seated in a room where there was a phonograph—if you had heard voices proceed from that instrument, not knowing what it was, and you had told about it later, the man you told of the phenomenon would have replied that it was absurd. Don't you think so?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is the reply to your remark. Absurd as it may seem, there *was* a flying-machine since there could have been no other way."

"Well? Go on, Nick."

"You have heard what I have been saying over the telephone—which might be counted another absurdity if we were not so familiar with it—and later, I shall call up the Wright brothers, in Indiana, and have a chat with them about it—after I receive answers from all the others. Now, we know of the great strides that have lately been made in the so-called 'heavier-than-air' proposition. I have decided in my own mind that there *is* a flying-machine of some sort in this business."

"Then what am I to argue about?"

"Why, you can say that if there was such a thing flying about over the city as late as noon to-day it would have been seen and commented upon."

"That idea occurred to me, but you seemed so confident about it that I did not venture to suggest it. I think it would have been seen. I think there would have been some excitement about it, particularly in the

neighborhood where it was seen—and I think, honestly, that you are a little bit 'up in the air' yourself about this affair, Nick."

"All right. Maybe I am. We will see about that!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOURFOLD PROBLEM.

"You see, Chick, I am confronted by a fourfold problem. It is comprehended in, or by, four questions. They are:

"Who is Idayah?

"What is her mysterious power?

"How did she get him out of his rooms in the apartment house?

"Why did she take him out at all? That is, why does she wish to spirit him away?

"There you are. Draw a bracket after those four questions, and after the bracket place an interrogation mark."

"You seem to be perfectly satisfied that it was she who did 'spirit' him away."

"I am; at least that is my conclusion."

"How do you know that it isn't all some huge hoax; that he is engaged in perpetrating upon you and others?"

"I know because he hasn't the intelligence to have performed it. He could not have gone from his apartment when he did and as he did without assistance; and he could not have gone as he did go and leave no trace behind him, unless he was taken out in a balloon or with a flying-machine."

"He might have engaged to have somebody go after him in a balloon."

"He might—yes."

"I am willing to admit the balloon idea, provided we can find somebody who saw a balloon, for one couldn't very well fly above the city at that hour of the day without being seen in the neighborhood by *somebody*."

"Granted."

"But I don't follow the flying-machine idea at all."

"It is no more remarkable than the disappearing powder; not so much so, in fact; and I have myself experienced the efficiency of that, as you know."

"Yes, but all the same, I don't swallow the flying-machine."

"You might—with that grin on your face, Chick."

"Do you think that the flying-machine might have entered at the window and taken the man up in its talons, after the manner of the American eagle, and carried him away, as the eagle would transport a tender lamb?"

"Don't chaff. I didn't call you here to do that."

"Well, suppose there was a flying-machine?"

"Yes."

"Suppose it was operated by Idayah."

"Yes."

"How did she get into the room where Starbuck was waiting for her?"

"Now you are talking. She alighted on the roof with the machine, the supports of which, when it rests upon the ground—"

"Or upon a roof."

"Yes; the supports are made by long strips that are fastened together after the manner of a ladder on either side, and these in turn are bound together by connecting rods between them. All of these rested in the snow at the top of the building. The machine alighted in a position that was lengthwise with the ends of the two supports projecting a foot or more over the edge of the roof, above Starbuck's windows. Whether she was alone on the machine, or if she had an assistant with her, it was not necessary that she should step off the affair. A rope ladder, or a sling, affixed to the ends of the supports where they projected over the edge of the roof, would afford a safe and sure means of descent to the window. She had already apprised him of her intended arrival, for I found a note that was evidently from her, making the appointment, although it is in a language that I cannot read. A pulley with a clutch, if a sling was used, would afford a safe and sure means of ascent to the roof from the window, and one can always lift rather more than one's own weight. You know that?"

"Yes."

"The flying-machine was at least thirty feet in length. If the ends projected two feet over the edge of the roof—which would be amply sufficient—there would be twenty-eight feet of leverage to support the weight of their bodies in making the ascent; and that would be more than three times sufficient. That is mathematic, Chick."

"Yes, always supposing that the projecting ends of the machine were strong enough."

"We have *got* to suppose that."

"It strikes me that we have *got* to suppose a great deal."

"Right. We have."

"Well, now, Nick, there is another question which seems to me unanswerable."

"Good! That is what I want—unanswerable questions. I have only had a few of them in connection with this case. One or two more won't cut any ice. What is this one?"

"You have told me that Ferguson was in the adjoining room to his master's all the time; that he had seen Starbuck within ten minutes of the time of your arrival there; that you had waited about an hour after your arrival before his absence was discovered, but that Ferguson was in the next room to him all the time. Now, the question is this: *Do you suppose that Starbuck was going to sit there like a Stoughton bottle and allow himself to be carried off in such a manner without once attempting to make any outcry?*"

"Yes; I do, emphatically. That is one of the questions of the fourfold problem. 'What is Idayah's mysterious power?' She has exerted it before. At the Garden, when he left me as he did, after securing a promise from me not to turn around, he was under the influence of that power. It is—it was the power of fear, of dread, of terror. You will say that Starbuck is not one to be afraid, to experience dread or to feel terror; but he did so, for he showed it in his face at that time. He was under the same mysterious influence when he was taken out of his room through the window and carried away in a flying-machine."

"It is all so confoundedly preposterous, Nick——"

"I know it is; and yet it has got beyond the realm of the impossible. We both know what strides have lately been made in the flying-machine industry, for it is an industry now. We know what Santos-Dumont has accomplished. We are told on good authority that the Wright brothers have flown thirty and forty and fifty miles with their invention; we are told that a machine must make thirty miles an hour or better to be practicable; we do not know but what other men in the world have progressed immeasurably farther than the Wright brothers in this line of progression—*and here we are confronted by an incontrovertable fact that in no other way could this man have been taken from that room.*

"He had at least an hour—or Idayah did. It is the same thing. She was due at a certain moment. She had informed him of that fact. He prepared for her coming by ordering his valet to leave him undisturbed for a length of time.

"Let us say that he did more: that she alighted on the roof at the appointed time. It would not have taken her ten or fifteen minutes after that to have him out of that room and on the roof. A half-hour's flight after that would have taken him anywhere from twenty to forty miles away, depending upon the speed of the machine. Presto! There you are."

"But aeroplanes have to have a level stretch to start from, don't they?"

"The ones we know about do. But I have often wondered why a propeller could not be made to extend vertically above the machine, which could be used to raise the machine from the ground; which could be closed when a sufficient height was attained, and then act as a sort of parachute—and then, if the wings of the thing were deflected, it could soar downward after the manner of a bird in attaining speed, and so go on, indefinitely."

"It all *sounds* mighty easy. But, admitting that it was a flying-machine that carried him off, how are you going to follow it?"

"I'll have to give that up—unless we can hear of it."

"It doesn't leave tracks in the air, as it did on the snow."

"No."

"There is another telephone call, Nick."

"I hear it."

"While you answer, if you don't mind, I'll take a walk out and institute a few inquiries about flying-machines. I would like to find out if anything of the sort has been seen over the city to-day, and I think I know how to do it."

"How?"

"Inquire of the Weather Bureau down-town. That is a point of constant observation. I might use a telephone, but I prefer to go there. I'll get a bite before I go out, and I'll order your dinner sent up here, eh?"

"Yes; do."

And so Chick went out while Nick turned his attention to the telephone.

The answers had begun to come in rapidly by that time, and for more than an hour after Chick's departure he was kept busy at the phone.

But to every inquiry he made he received unsatisfactory replies.

As he had supposed, every balloon and every balloonist was known, and records were kept of them all.

There was not an answer to any one of the questions he had asked which afforded him the least assistance in

his search for information. All balloons were accounted for; all aeroplanes which would have answered to his description were pooh-poohed.

It was almost ten o'clock in the evening when he got into communication with the famous Wright brothers, of Ohio, and Chick had not yet returned even then.

But the detective was at once interested in what the Wright brothers had to say.

Nick began by telling them who he was, for they were both at the phone, and each with a receiver at his ear, they told him, although only one of them replied to him. He told them very plainly what had happened, and as nearly as he could do so, how it happened; and he concluded with the following statement and question:

"I have heard of the reports about your successes, and I have believed them. I am not asking you to reveal any of your secrets, or to tell me what you have or have not accomplished. What I do wish you to tell me is this: Given the same conditions as those I have described, could you or either of you, with one of the machines of your invention, have flown from say, a point in Jersey to the building in question? Could you have alighted surely and securely upon that building? Could you have taken that man—willingly, of course—from his room and have flown away with him again? In a word, is it a feat that is possible of performance?"

The reply came without hesitation.

"It is a feat that is entirely possible. Either of us could have done it. The circumstance that you have described does not impress us as at all wonderful; it certainly is not impossible, and it is as certainly *quite probable*."

"Thank you," said the detective. "And now, by any chance, has one of your machines gotten away from you?"

"No."

"Do you know of anybody or have you heard of anybody who has progressed along the same lines as yourselves, as far, or nearly as far, as you have done?"

"No."

"Can either of you suggest anything that would aid me at all in this inquiry?"

"No."

And the detective hung up the receiver after assuring them of his gratitude for their trouble and pains.

And just then Chick returned. He entered the room abruptly.

"Nick!" he exclaimed, "I shouldn't at all wonder if you are right after all in your surmises."

"How is that?" asked the detective.

"Some sort of a flying-machine, which is not a balloon, but which has been supposed to be a kite in some form, has been seen over the city, not only to-day but many times lately. It is described as being almost invisible, the color being of a gauzy blue, like the sky. Powerful glasses brought to bear upon it have revealed nothing more than a kite-like arrangement of considerable expanse, with two dark specks apparently riding in the center of it."

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNKNOWN VEHICLE OF THE AIR.

Notwithstanding the multitudinous questions which the detective asked his assistant respecting the announcement he had just made, Chick could vouchsafe no further information than he had included in the statement made by him upon entering the room.

Nor had he been able to learn that the spectacle in the air had been noticed by people generally. It had been seen from the weather observatory, for the reason that their business was to keep watch of the heavens, and to notice any phenomena of any sort that might be discovered; and lately, the bureau-man had admitted, he had been in the habit of watching for balloons, being himself somewhat interested in the subject.

"Well," said the detective at last, "I am at least satisfied now that it was a flying-machine that took Starbuck away. I am also satisfied that the flying-machine was owned and operated by Idayah. I am also convinced that Idayah has others of her own people in this country with her who are capable of operating the machine as well as she does, and that it was one of them who paid the occasional visits to Starbuck at his country-place up the Hudson. Go to bed, Chick. I'm going to sit here and study over this puzzle for some time yet. You know there isn't a thing that we can do now, save to await developments. And I have a fancy that we will hear something about Idayah before long. I know rather more about her than she cares to have known outside of her select few, and I should not be surprised if she decided to pay me a visit before she departs for her own country, taking Starbuck with her."

Left alone, he remained for a long time staring at the fire.

Once he took a book in his hand and undertook to read its pages; but they blurred before his eyes, and he laid it aside again.

He smoked cigar after cigar, and cast the butts aside, only to light a fresh one.

At last, as he cast aside what he intended to be his final cigar for that night, he glanced across the room at the clock and noticed with surprise that the hands pointed at two. He did not realize that the night had so far advanced.

He crossed the floor toward the window, turning off the electric light as he passed it, so that he could see outside to discover what sort of a night it was; and then he pulled the curtain aside and put his face close to the pane to look out.

As he did so he started and almost held his breath, for against the starlight, and between him and what light there was in the sky, a huge shadow flitted past.

He had no view of it; it could not be correctly said that he even caught a glimpse of it. He was merely conscious that a shadow had passed. It came, and it had gone before he was aware of its presence—but he knew that he had not been mistaken. He knew that the shadow had come and gone.

Whether it was low down, near the roof of his house, or if it was high in the air, he had no idea whatever; but in his present frame of mind he could account for the appearance of that shadow in only one way—*the flying-machine.*

At any other time in his life than that one, he would have supposed it to be caused by a cloud; but now he had been thinking of flying-machines ever since Chick left him to retire, and his mind was in that receptive state where anything might have evolved itself into a vehicle of the air without astonishment to his sense of propriety.

His first sensation was one of gladness that he had turned off his light before he approached the window; the next was the necessity for haste in his movements.

He turned and sprang to the door; he reached the stairs to the upper floors and dashed up them, silently but swiftly.

There was a way out upon Nick Carter's roof by a narrow, closed-in flight of steep stairs to a hooded door upon the roof, and he lost no time in reaching it.

He paused there, having turned the key in the lock—turned and listened before he opened the door, *and he heard two things—he heard the steadily tread of feet upon the roof outside, and he also heard the murmur of voices.*

"Shall I wait for them, or shall I meet them half-way?" was the mental question he asked of himself; and he decided to wait at least for a moment, although his curiosity was almost consuming lest his strange callers should literally take to themselves wings and fly away before he got a sight of them at all.

But after he had waited a considerable time and nobody approached the door behind which he stood, his impatience could no longer withstand the temptation to discover what was there, and so with great caution he raised the latch of the door and slowly pushed it open.

The roof of Nick Carter's house was one of three houses in that street which were of the same height, and as the detective opened the door a little way in order to see out he was a-truly amazed at what he saw.

Resting lightly upon the roof, and stretching across it so that it touched upon the roof of the house adjoining, was a vapory, translucent, filmy substance, bird-like in shape, nearly invisible, and yet plainly there—*a substance which was without doubt the outlines of the mysterious flying-machine.*

Beside it, a few feet nearer to him, were the figures of two human beings. Their clothing was of the same neutral coloring as the machine, but he could see them nevertheless; and the unusually tall form of one of them assured the detective at once that it could be no other than Starbuck himself; while the person with him——

The detective did not wait to indulge in further conjecture.

The flying-machine was there, on his own roof. Starbuck was there; without doubt Idayah was there. Before him was a solution of all the mysteries that had puzzled the detective so sorely.

With sudden determination he dashed the door wide open and leaped out upon the roof.

The incidents that followed made him suspect that they expected him to appear; and indeed, afterward, he knew that that was so; that his light had been seen to go out suddenly; that they supposed they had been discovered; that they expected him to come to the roof to investigate, and were waiting patiently for him to appear, having no doubt in the meantime that he was engaged in watching them and studying them through a crevice in the door, as he actually had been doing.

And thus it was that Idayah was prepared for him

when he suddenly burst through the door and leaped toward her.

Much can happen in an instant of time; much happened in the instant of time which followed upon Nick Carter's appearance.

From the roof door to the spot where Idayah stood the distance was possibly twenty feet; and any one who is familiar with Nick Carter's capabilities can realize how little time it required for him to cover it.

As if alarmed by his sudden appearance, Idayah started away from him, and seemed to disappear among the folds, or the substance—whatever it was—of the bird-like affair that had brought them there; and Nick noticed then, for the first time, that although both figures had appeared to be standing between him and the machine, they were, in reality, standing *upon* it; and again, as she turned away from her companion, who was Starbuck, Nick heard her say something to him sharply, at which he sank down obediently upon the spot where he was standing.

But by the time Idayah had disappeared, and Starbuck had sank down, so that he was seated with his arms clasper around his knees, Nick had taken the two or three jumps required to cover the distance.

He had alighted upon the machine itself. He seized Starbuck by the shoulder and shook him lustily. Starbuck did not answer. He seemed to be oblivious, or deaf and dumb, or paralyzed—anyhow, he was incapable of action, for he did not respond in any way to Nick Carter's words or acts.

And then the whirring as of an electric fan of huge proportions startled the detective; and instantly he was conscious that the strange vehicle of the air was leaving the roof, was rising vertically away from it—*was carrying him away with it into the unknown spaces of the air.*

Again he called to Starbuck and received no response. Then he seized him in his arms and sought to raise him—but only to find that short straps were around his ankles, which held him firmly in his place.

The machine was slowly rising from the roof. It was already five feet above it when Nick dived into his pocket for his knife.

He drew the knife out and opened the blade—they were ten feet above the roof.

He cut the straps with two swift strokes—they were fifteen feet above the roof.

He seized Starbuck in his arms and lifted him bodily—they were already twenty feet above the roof and rising rapidly—and he leaped with his burden away from the machine, and the two men fell together through the intervening space to the roof of Nick Carter's house.

Alone, Nick could have made the jump safely enough; but burdened as he was with more than two hundred pounds of Starbuck's weight, they fell heavily, and somehow Starbuck half-fell upon the detective, partly knocking the breath out of him—half-stunning him—so that for a moment he was dazed and could not rise to his feet.

And when he did stagger to his feet he could only stand and stare toward the sky, into which the unthinkable vehicle had disappeared. He could see only a gauzy, filmy something that was floating swiftly away through the air—a something which at that moment passed directly through a sharp ray of electric light that was accidentally flashed upon it from a war-ship in the river—and then it disappeared.

* * * * * * *

The detective called his assistant after he had carried Starbuck to his own room, and together they tried to rouse him out of the lethargy into which he had been thrown by some mysterious influence which Idayah seemed to exert over him, whether she was present or absent; but he did not respond to their treatment. He seemed well enough; he breathed regularly; he opened his eyes and looked at them, and nodded, and seemed to understand; but he was incapable of speech, almost incapable of action.

"Do you understand me?" Nick asked him at last, in despair.

Starbuck nodded his head.

"Can you explain all these mysteries?"

Starbuck's head remained motionless.

"Can you explain part of them? Some of them?" asked the detective.

Starbuck nodded his head again.

"When you find your speech again will you do it?"

Starbuck nodded his head a third time.

In due time Nick heard the whole thing, and wondered if he had really seen the last of this wonderful female wizard of the air. For Starbuck's sake he sincerely hoped so.

THE END.

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